

# Byron L. Dorgan

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## **DORGAN ANNOUNCES \$475,000 IN FEDERAL FUNDING FOR DEPOPULATION SYMPOSIUM TO BE PLANNED AND HOSTED BY DICKINSON STATE UNIVERSITY**

(BISMARCK, N.D.) --- U.S. Senator Byron L. Dorgan announced Tuesday that Dickinson State University (DSU) will plan and host a major multi-state symposium to study depopulation problems in rural America, identify specific reasons why some areas are losing population, and recommend federal policy changes that will help reverse out-migration from rural areas.

The substantial loss of population in most rural counties throughout the entire Midwestern part of the United States led Dorgan, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, to seek funding for the multi-state symposium, which will be financed with a \$475,000 appropriation that Dorgan wrote into the appropriations bill last year.

"Rural America has so much to offer the United States - good neighbors, safe streets, wonderful communities," Dorgan said. "Yet, the economic lifeblood is being sucked out of our rural communities by a decades-old march from the country to the city. We know that an inadequate farm program is what is failing to keep family farmers on the farm, and we must change that. But that is not all that's happening - something else is at work and we need to find public policy approaches that can reverse this trend."

Dorgan was joined by DSU President Dr. Lee Vickers in announcing the symposium. Vickers said DSU is a natural choice for conducting the symposium since it is centrally located in the region most affected by depopulation. As the lead institution, Dickinson State will plan and host the symposium and will also coordinate the involvement of North Dakota State University, University of Montana, Colorado State University and Iowa State University.

"DSU has the opportunity to provide leadership on an issue that is having a profound impact on rural America," Vickers said. "We will go beyond sharing information and develop a comprehensive plan to engage policymakers and opinion leaders at the local, regional, and national level in a process of reversing the depopulation trends."

Out-migration in the Great Plains, particularly of young people, results in reduced birth rates and a rising overall age. The effect on health care, education, economic development and quality of life can be devastating to small rural communities and even larger population centers.

"With the advent of information technology which essentially declares the death of distance, there is no reason we can not find public policies to move more activities that used to be performed in big cities to now provide jobs and opportunities in rural areas," Dorgan added.

Vickers and Dorgan met with representatives of the General Services Administration (GSA) in Washington, D.C. last month to finalize funding for the symposium. According to the memorandum of understanding signed by the university and GSA, DSU will plan and host the symposium, which will identify depopulation trends in North Dakota, Iowa, Montana and Colorado, and develop policy recommendations to address the problem in a pro-active manner.

The symposium is scheduled for 2001 and will involve educators, community leaders, policy experts and government officials.

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